

CARL R. LOUNSBURY

THE COURTHOUSES OF EARLY VIRGINIA

An Architectural History



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CHARLOTTESVILLE AND LONDON



FIGURE 59. Lower Church, Christ Church Parish, Middlesex County, 1714, one of the earliest examples of the more restrained style of brick decoration

The bond of the exterior brickwork shaped the most conspicuous of these patterns. Solid brick walls measuring anywhere from 12 inches to 2 feet in thickness were bonded together in various ways to ensure stability of construction. Colonial bricklayers carefully laid the outside facing bricks in a lime and sand mortar in one of two bonds. The exterior face of English bond walls contained courses of long bricks, or stretchers, alternating with courses of short bricks, or headers. In contrast, Flemish bond walls had an alternating pattern of headers and stretchers in the same course. This latter bond became standard in courthouse construction by the second quarter of the eighteenth century and remained the preferred choice on primary courthouse facades in Virginia through the 1840s, long after so-called common bond and other types of bonding had supplanted it in other regions. Despite the predominance of Flemish bond, some builders combined it with English bond foundations. In the Essex (1729), Hanover (c. 1740), Williamsburg–James City (1771), and Warwick (1810) courthouses, English bond plinths supported Flemish bond walls above the water table. Builders emphasized this break between the thicker foundation walls and the rest of the building by a band of molded water-table bricks. While most courthouses had simple beveled water tables, the ones at Northampton County (1731) and Charles City County (c. 1757) had a two-course water table. At the



FIGURE 71. Charles City County courthouse, c. 1757.

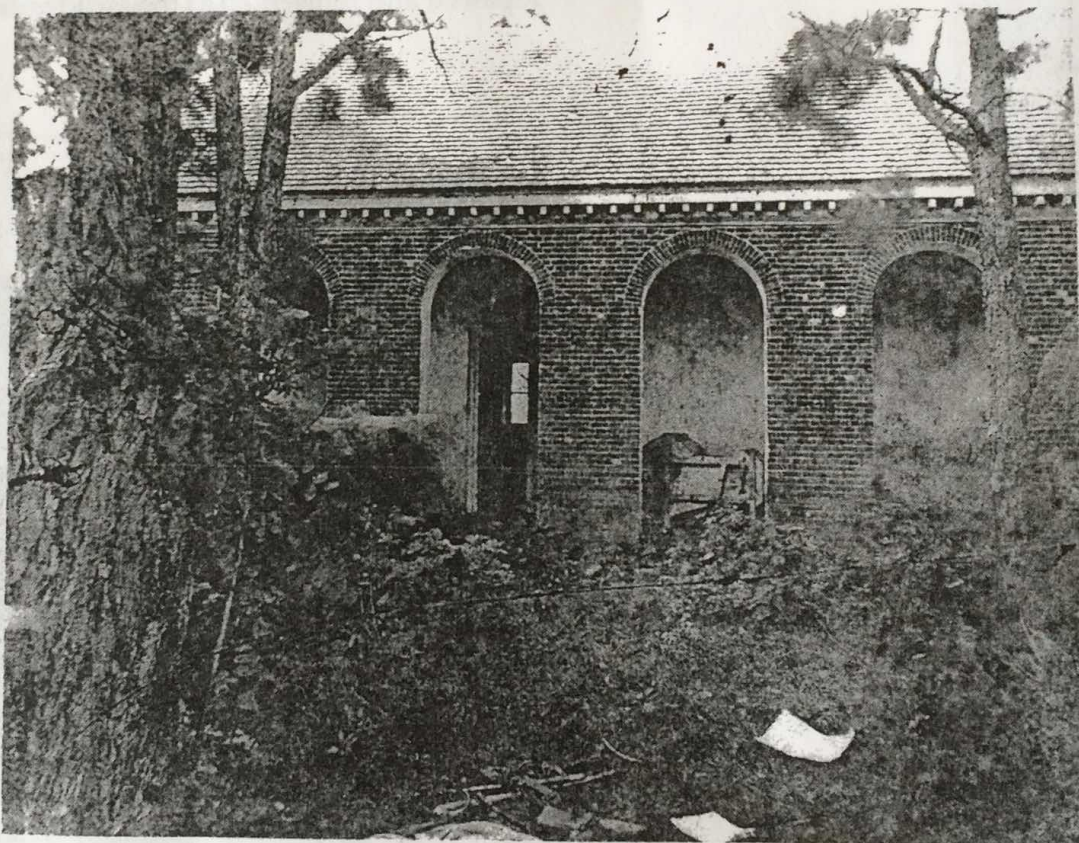


FIGURE 72. Charles City County courthouse arcade before it was enclosed, in a June 13, 1864, photograph. (Library of Congress)

mensions as the T-shaped brick one in King and Queen County. John Wily finished the building by 1766.

1794: The magistrates ordered the county seat to be moved to Bowling Green.

1808: John Hoomes completed the courthouse in Bowling Green.

1835: The present two-story arcaded brick courthouse was built about this time.

An addition and extensive alterations were made to the building in 1970.

Charles City County (1634)

1659: During its earliest years the county stretched across both sides of the James River, and the court was peripatetic, rotating venues. In 1659 the magistrates ordered Edward Hill and John Stith to finish the courthouse at Westover.

1665: A new earthfast courthouse was built at Westover.

1687: William Bernard and John Baxter undertook the construction of a framed courthouse measuring 35 by 20 feet.

1757: In the late 1740s justices levied money for the construction of a new courthouse. Richard Bland completed the present T-shaped, arcaded brick courthouse in 1757. Damaged slightly during the Civil War, the courthouse was repaired and reoriented as the arcade was enclosed and the entrance moved



FIGURE A2. Charles City County courthouse and clerk's office, in a June 13, 1864, photograph. From Alexander Gardner, *Gardner's Photographic Sketch Book of the War 2* (Washington, D.C., 1865–66), 168. (Courtesy of The Library of Virginia)

to the lower end of the building in the last quarter of the nineteenth century (figs. A2, A3, A4).

1901: In the late nineteenth century, the old clerk's office next to the courthouse was torn down, and the present fireproof office erected by the B. F. Smith Company took its place.

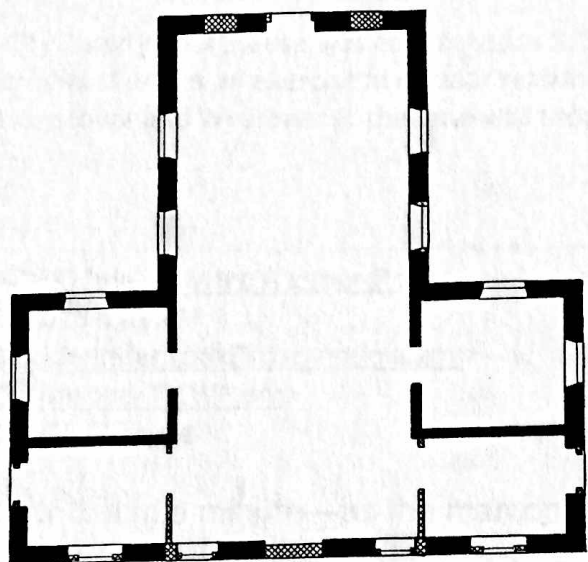
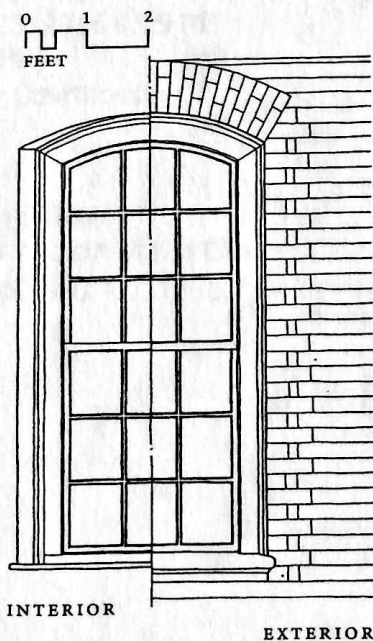
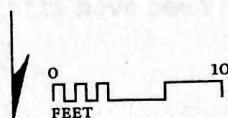


FIGURE A3. Plan, Charles City County Courthouse, 1757



INTERIOR

EXTERIOR

INTERIOR

EXTERIOR



FIGURE A4. Detail of north window and jamb of the east jury room, Charles City County courthouse. This window frame and sash are rare survivors from the mid-1750s.

Loux, Jennifer (DHR)

From: Lounsbury, Carl <CLounsbury@CWF.org>
Sent: Tuesday, July 26, 2016 5:37 PM
To: Wagner, Marc (DHR); Loux, Jennifer (DHR)
Subject: RE: Charles City Courthouse

Marc, et al.

The Charles City County Courthouse was completed in 1757 when Richard Bland, the undertaker, received his final payment for its construction. In an exercise in circular reasoning, the c. 1730 date was given to it because the brickwork looked like Westover and Westover at the time was thought to have been built around 1730, now we know it was 1750-51.

Carl

From: Wagner, Marc (DHR) [<mailto:Marc.Wagner@dhr.virginia.gov>]
Sent: Tuesday, July 26, 2016 4:21 PM
To: Loux, Jennifer (DHR) <Jennifer.Loux@dhr.virginia.gov>
Cc: Lounsbury, Carl <CLounsbury@CWF.org>
Subject: RE: Charles City Courthouse

Jen: Carl would know this in a minute—as the man on Colonial courthouses...he's copied. Marc

From: Loux, Jennifer (DHR)
Sent: Tuesday, July 26, 2016 4:19 PM
To: Wagner, Marc (DHR)
Subject: Charles City Courthouse

Marc,

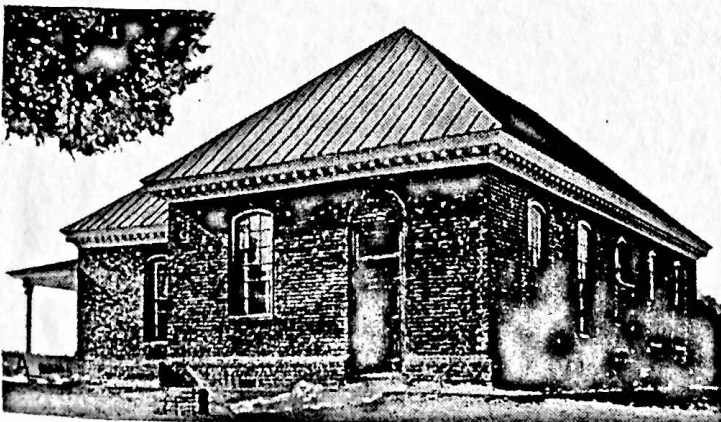
Is there a date of construction of the Charles City Courthouse that is accepted by modern architectural historians? The nomination (from 1969) says "ca. 1730," while the VLR book says "1750s" and an RTD article from 1996 gives a date of 1760.

Thanks,
Jen



LOTT CARY BIRTH SITE, Charles City vicinity. For two centuries this late 18th-century vernacular dwelling has been recognized as the birthplace of Lott Cary (1780–1829), the first black American missionary to Africa and a founding father of Liberia. The house is the only remnant of the plantation of John Bowry, on which Cary was born a slave. Cary lived here until 1804 when Bowry hired him out to a Richmond tobacco manufacturer. Cary taught himself to read and write and eventually purchased his freedom. He was ordained a Baptist minister and became active in the African Missionary Society and the American Colonization Society. With support from the American Baptist Board of Foreign Missions, he journeyed to Liberia where he founded the Providence Baptist Church of Monrovia and helped establish native schools. Cary died unaware that he had been elected governor of the colony. (18–61) VLR: 05/20/80; NRHP: 07/30/80.

CHARLES CITY COUNTY COURTHOUSE, Charles City. Named for Prince Charles, later King Charles I, the Charles City Corporation was established in 1618 and became Charles City County in 1642. Earlier courthouses were located at City Point and then Westover. The present courthouse was erected in the 1750s following the imposition in 1748 and 1749 of a special levy for the construction of a new court building. After its completion, the court made payments to Col. Richard Bland, a builder. The compact edifice is one of Virginia's six remaining arcaded colonial courthouses. The similarity of the brickwork to that at nearby Westover suggests that the two buildings shared brickmasons. The courthouse was rifled by Union troops during the Civil War, and many early records were lost. The arcade was later enclosed to provide additional space. The courthouse still serves its original use after two and a half centuries. (18–05) VLR: 09/09/69; NRHP: 11/17/69.



EAGLE'S NEST, Walker Store vicinity. On a high bluff overlooking the Chickahominy River, Eagle's Nest is a small but carefully crafted planter's house built between 1700 and 1729. Its brickwork is distinctive for employing English bond with all glazed headers, which give the walls a striped appearance. Like the Adam Thoroughgood house, Eagle's Nest has one interior end chimney and one exterior end chimney. The latter is set off by tiled weatherings and a set-back T-shaped stack. The original roof was destroyed in the early 20th century when the house was raised to two stories. In 1979 the property was acquired for a game preserve by the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. The house with a small tract was subsequently conveyed to the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities and was sold to private owners in 1981 whereupon it underwent a meticulous restoration. (18–37) VLR: 07/17/73; NRHP: 08/17/73.

EDGEWOOD AND HARRISON'S MILL, Charles City vicinity. The storybook Gothic Revival house at Edgewood is an architectural contrast to the area's noted colonial plantation houses. It was built around 1854 for Richard S. Rowland of New Jersey, who moved here to operate the mill that stands just behind the house. The mill, an 18th-century structure, was originally owned by Benjamin Harrison V of nearby Berkeley and was visited during the Revolution by British troops led by Benedict Arnold. It was largely rebuilt in the early 19th century to accommodate updated machinery. During the Peninsula campaign of 1862 Confederate cavalry leader Gen. J. E. B. Stuart found refreshment at the Rowland house. Two weeks later part of Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan's Army of the Potomac encamped at Edgewood. A familiar landmark along historic Route 5, Edgewood has been restored to serve as an inn. (18–58) VLR: 12/14/82; NRHP: 02/10/83.

